

Croynan Hall

The Maid of the Mask
A Tale of Rothenburg

By Ray Palmer Baker

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CROYNAN HALL.

THE MAID OF THE MASK.

A TALE OF ROTHENBURG.

:: CROYNAN HALL ::
THE MAID OF THE MASK
A TALE OF ROTHENBURG

BY
RAY PALMER BAKER
HAMILTON, CANADA

TORONTO
WILLIAM BRIGGS
1908

ENTERED according to Act of the Parliament of Canada, in the
year one thousand nine hundred and eight, by
RAY PALMER BAKER,
at the Department of Agriculture.

IN LOVING MEMORY

OF

Alice Gray Baker

THIS VOLUME

Is affectionately dedicated

BY

HER BROTHER

79119

“And yet, dear heart! remembering thee,
Am I not richer than of old?”

—*Whittier.*

PREFACE.

IT was my ambition, at first, to produce an epic that might fittingly commemorate the struggles and achievements of the United Empire Loyalists. The following books form a kind of introduction to the real work, but are nevertheless complete in themselves. I have therefore decided to present them to the English-speaking people of America, with the earnest hope that they may not be entirely unacceptable to those interested in the literary possibilities of a great historical period.

R. P. B.

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CROYNAN HALL.

CROYNAN HALL.

I.

IN days romantic, high among the crags
Of old colonial New Hampshire, lay
The streets of Moringworth, a village tucked
Beneath a ridge of moss-encrusted mould.
For half a mile or so, the cottages
Went straggling down the slope like browsing sheep
That, fleecy-coated, crop the luscious sward.
One stately home of nobler mien upreared
Its walls more prosperously fair—a touch
Of England, pine-like standing to the sky.
It seemed a spot apart from Moringworth,
Whose dwindled commerce, art and government
Long since had passed to cities by the sea,
Where ocean liners load their living freight
For foreign lands. Half-hidden here, o'ertopped
By listless-hanging spruce and chestnut trees,

The village lived in isolated calm.
It woke, perchance, when, ponderous and slow,
The groaning stage rough-jolted to the coast
Its weekly mail, with passengers more bent
On bargaining than were the villagers,
Who year by year lived out their little lives,
Unthinking of the ways of Providence,
So fitted to their little-cornered needs.
The silent, sloping valleys and the streams
Beneath the crested hills, that overlook
The fertile fields and pastures of the south,
In fief and kind their ancient tribute paid.
At dusk, when April rains renewed the fields
Of dew-enamelled green, each tinkling flock
Filed gently through the lower lands, and cropped
The meadow there in leisurely return.
With noiseless feet the Summer slipped away.
The waving grain and golden hung, and then
No master-touch was wanting to the scene
Where God creating held not back His hand
From seed-time, harvest and the joy of hope.

In old New England days, amongst these streams
And rifted hills, lived Aubrey Vere de Vere,

The single son and promise of his race;
And heir, by birth, to lands of rich estate
That inly marked a nation's gratitude
For services of secret gallantry
And diplomatic skill.

Three lonely miles

Below the town the spacious manor stood,
Surrounded now by fields of golden maize
And grassy meadows claimed by great-eyed kine
And goodly flocks that drowsily the sun
Surveyed till sleep-compelling Night appeared
And clothed the corn-fields with her mantled gloom.
So, like a pall, the gray-robed Evening trailed
Her skirts o'er rock and rill and touched the streets
Of Moringworth; no harsher sound betrayed
The cooling breath of Life Inanimate.
Her garments rustled in the misty air
And chinked each blatant weathercock that ruled
Supreme o'er gabled roofs and porticoes.
The creeping twilight closed its open arms
And kissed the lips of nearer-nestling Earth.
A solitary night-hawk wheeled and shrilled
And circled in the world-absorbing sky.
From every cottage pane the lights flared out—

A myriad of sentinels, like stars
In space; and beaconing above them rose
The chandeliers of Reginald Design,
A man of men, and not unloved, but cramped
And straitened by his time to meet the need
And essence of the hour. The elements
Of hope could not his soul conduce, nor point
A way of peace and happiness to him
Who trod no paths where duty did not lead.
The joy of youth, the love of living born
With birth, revealed in him no counterpart
Of years, no heritage of flesh unmatched
By strength of intellect. He felt himself
Above the limits of his place, but missed
The nearer truths that lead to greater things.
He scorned the pomp and heraldry of birth,
And owned no rank save aristocracy
Of mind. The pride of fortune, land and race
Was stifled in his heart, yet in his soul
He dreamed of noble deeds and bowed his head
Before a brotherhood of blood, a shrine
That dwindled every virtue of his day,
But reared for him a monument of time
When men are kings—and kings of mean estate.

Such, then, was Reginald Design, the friend
And comrade close of Aubrey Vere de Vere,
But adverse so, in life and sentiment,
That each the other as a magnet drew,
With poles dissimilar.

They shaped their ways
By distant stars, but drifted with the wind
That drove them on in silent-slipping course.
Full nineteen seasons they had seen the Spring
O'erspread the purple hills of Moringworth.
Together they had crossed the streams and tramped
The gorges to the north in search of game
To swell their larder's store, or launched their boats
Upon the river's icy tide and swung
Their prows far toward the crimson-setting sun,
Returning in the Autumn, rich with furs
And secrets of the wild. Oft they had passed
The valleys sweet with eglantine, or reined
Their horses in the bottoms flecked with flocks
And guarded by the silent cottages
That stretched before their half-discerning eyes.
Thus they had climbed the winding roads that led
To Croynan Hall and spurred their steeds to claim

Its hospitality; for well they knew
That one its emblems held who still maintained
Its old prerogatives and revelling
At will. Its massy portals, half ensconced
Beneath the mountain's dizzy height, o'erlooked
The fields below. A bramble-footed wood
The manor screened from common view, but failed
To hide the lofty aisle of poplar trees
That narrowed to the mansion's grassy close
With rustic seat and vine-clad portico.
Here would the traveller his journey stay
And look upon that scene in distance lost
And undulating haze. Before him lay
The fertile, furrowed plains of Moringworth,
All studded o'er with heavy-headed sheaves
Of ripened grain and creaking wains of hay
That still exhaled their summer-scented breath
Beneath the colonnades of Croynan Hall.

The Mecca of a country-side, and pride
Of half the region round, it long maintained
Its social state of marked pre-eminence.
To-night its floors and stairways wide were thronged
With eager feet; for once a year its doors

Were swung to cottager and kin. From day
To day the village looked to this, the night
Of nights, when, unabashed and fetterless,
The village youths would village maidens meet
In rustic games and pastimes filled with rounds,
Festivities and legendary lore
Long-hidden since in mists and memories
Of time. Amongst his guests the master moved
And pausing spake, or passing saw his halls
And corridors usurped by couples bent
On pleasures scarcely found amidst the noise
And merriment. The fortune-yielding flames
Upon the hearth their secrets gave to groups
Of laughing girls who read their future there
With little gasps of joy. The music made
An echo in the night. The smiling host
Reclaimed his rightful seat, and, rising, pledged
The honor of his friends. He recognized,
He said, the bonds that made them one, and hoped,
Believed, that these would doubly strengthened be
With each succeeding year. They could not know
The fullest issue of the day, but now
They saw its peace and rich prosperity.
He strove to gain their closest confidence,

And wished them life and health and happiness;
And not for self alone he sought their hearts,
But prayed that she, his only child, who bore
The honors of the house, might learn to fill
Her mother's place, and know their joys and feel
Their sorrows too. So Arthur Croynan spake,
And through the night the merrymakers drew.
The rooms were still. A favored few alone
Remained to taste a quiet cheer through right
Of birth or ancient friendship's claim. Here, then,
Stayed Aubrey Vere de Vere and Reginald—
For where the one his entertainment sought
The other was—and, lightly-speaking, hard
Beside the fender sat and watched the logs
Within the mantel's close their castles rear
In odd, fantastic shapes. Each falling brand
Some scene romantic drew. The crackling corn
Lay sizzling on the coals. The cider, sharp
And crabbèd with old age, its quality
Upheld, and red the ripened chestnuts glowed,
Explosive in the flame. So willingly,
Reluctant yet to leave, they paused to hear
The voice of Ethel Croynan, tremulous,
Some tale of rustic rivalry relate.

Her eighteen summers lingering foretold
A richer grace and loveliness. The charm
And beauty of her words eclipsed the hour
And lateness of the night, and filled their hearts
With golden dreams and pleasant memories,
Until the pathos of her place usurped
The maiden's brighter mood and keyed her voice
To sad, soft semi-tones. Whereat a smile
Would light her face and linger on her lips,
Subdued beneath a girlish wistfulness
That vanished with each lighter pleasantry.

Anon the hour of midnight parting came.
Far through the hills the pleasure-seekers rode,
And one by one the candles disappeared
And left the Hall as sombre as the night.
The sleeping plains in mist-engendered clouds
Were hidden quite; the peeping stars crept out
Beneath the crescent's fringe—and all was still.

II.

THE Winter passed, and slow-returning Spring
Beheld the village filled with whisperings

Of warfare. Gossips stood in doorways wide
And spake of parliament and people pressed
To acts of base reproach by taunts devised
For future law and precedent. Imbued
With hate, their anger hung on insults keen
And bitter deeds of arbitrary rule.

Unguardedly they talked of strife, and told
Of rioting within the city streets.

They dinned their arguments upon the ears
Of passers-by, and harped upon the right,
Acquired by centuries of passive law,
To hold their lives and liberties supreme
In questions deemed by them of high account
And close-concerning interest. Or now
Some rustic Solon rose, and from his place
Upon the village green proclaimed his views
Of legislative skill, and showed the means
Of force prepared for these indignities.

Such wild harangues the people moved—or those
Whom fortune's frown had made dissatisfied—
And tyrant-like, unreasoning, restrained
The rights of speech in men of saner mind,
Who, clearer-visioned, strove to check the strife
And calm the frenzied populace. The joy

Of peace could not allure the restless hearts
Of hungry agitators bent on gain
And ultimate control. Their birth, at best,
Was but a thing to ornament their words
And further their designs. Each circumstance
Of state, through chance and dark manœuvering,
Their object nearer brought, till every claim
Was justified before the people tricked
To ends and policies that they abhorred,
And forced to never-ending bitterness.

Anon the dreaded cry of battle came
And, like a freshet's energy released,
The fiery tale of Lexington awoke
The hamlet's calm. From every tufted hill
The files of musketeers came trooping down
To join the squads of minute-men who dressed
Their ranks on quick command from Reginald,
And, little-thinking, lightly marched away
To fields of chance and carnage-dealing Death.
Ah! sweet the breath of morning seemed and warm
The April air, as fainter still their eyes
Beheld the imaged hills of Moringworth.
How calm, impervious, the village looked

That fair New England day, ere clank of steel
And pulsing feet each hidden echo woke,
And unrestrained the summons came that gave
A nation birth! Far through the valleys gemmed
With ledges, lakes and falling rivulets
The volunteers advanced. The stealing hours
Of twilight darkened down, and from the hills
The sunset watched their silent bivouac.
The Night crept on. The slanting moonbeams showed
The ridges motionless as sentinels
Who turned their hearts from home and happiness.
The camp-fires crackled in the deeper gloom,
And drowsing there amongst his men, with eyes
Half-closed, did Reginald behold the face
Of Ethel Croynan imaged in the dusk.
A pleasing numbness seized his wearied limbs
And mastered every dull, diminished sound,
Till suddenly a comrade's laugh recalled
His thoughts and Night's necessity. He felt
The peace increscent in his soul, and checked
The smile that lingered on his fevered lips;
Then gave again his orders for the night,
And drew his cloak about his arm—and slept.

Soon they had reached the southern heights where lay
The English regulars besieged, betimes,
By lines of continental musketeers.
The long night-watches softened into days
That brought them hours of skirmishing. Again
The summons came for volunteers; and corps
On corps unending marched against the posts
And fortresses beyond that still maintained
Their British garrisons. With ready aid
Importunate was Reginald Design,
Inflamed, perchance, with patriotic pride,
But sick at heart with camps and drunken brawls
Amongst the restless soldiery, and glad
To have again the right to view the hills
Of Moringworth.

Along the village street

He pricked his wearied horse, and smiled to see
The life his coming brought, as one by one
The people round him pressed and blocked his way,
Whilst he, good-natured, laughed as best he might,
And answer gave to every question raised
About the war, and how their troopers fared,
And what the prospects were for full success,

Or early-coming settlement and peace
For all concerned. At length the common mind
Was satisfied and free to register
Its views of military skill. Its pride
Could claim no dearer-cherished privilege.
To criticize the faults of those whom chance
Had placed beyond the pale of its reproach
And policy of unrequited hope
Bespake its joy and natural design.
Then presently the clamor ceased, and thus
Did Reginald his way regain and turn
His courser nearer home.

How dear to him
Each valley seemed, each scarlet-crested hill,
Each lofty pine that marked his mountain home,
Where, hard beside the mossy gate, he checked
His charger's course and, scanning carelessly
The way, beheld a hand in greeting raised,
And heard a voice he could not well mistake
A right warm welcome give. Swift-galloping
And white with dust, he saw his comrade ride,
And, vaulting from his saddle-seat, express
His heartiest delight. Each youthful look,

Each passing sign of mutual regard,
Bespake a friendship deeper far than art
Or show by subtle etiquette employed.
With eager confidence ingenuous
They talked of strange mutations, and the joy
And loveliness of life; nor overlooked
The sorrow and the sadness too—the pain
Of parting and the long-delayed return.
In lighter-colored tones they spake of friends
And friendships sweet: the future that was theirs—
The paths of pleasure that before them lay,
The weeks of profit and of well-won ease.
Then boy-like, too, they each by turn inquired
Of every chance acquaintance, but forgot
The name that, each withholding, hoped to hear
And neither cared to speak, till Reginald—
By chance, it seemed, and scarce of full intent—
The mooted question asked: “ How is our friend,
The Lady of the Hall? You have not told
Me yet.” But Aubrey laughed: “ My honored Sir,
The reason is not hard to find, and more,
A better answer you shall have than mine.”
Then, glancing up, they saw her rein her horse
A rod away, and, bowing low, exclaim:

“ How does my gallant cavalier? What! Tired
So soon of glorious pursuits? Indeed,
I must confess it grieves me sore to see
Such craven-heartedness in one I hold
So dear; but yet I fear such precepts fair
And admonitions grave become me ill.
I am too much engaged to stay me now,
But come, I pray, to Croynan when you can;
A ready welcome you will always find.”
So winningly, with arching eyebrows raised,
To Reginald her invitation gave;
Who courteous, as needs he must, declined,
Regretting most his hurried visiting
And quick return upon his northward march.
But ere he paused for breath the lady waved
A signal of farewell and pricked her mount
To unaccustomed speed; while thoughtfully
The others watched her vanish from their sight,
And soon their ways reluctantly resumed.

III.

WHEN Hallowtide brought Hallowe'en, and hearths
Were warm at Croynan Hall, then from the Grange

Along the narrow, winding river bank
Impetuous rode Aubrey Vere de Vere.
He chose the wooded way, and through the Drift
And up the Glen his foam-flecked charger flew.
Within the town the bandog gnarled his note
Of fear; the shutters swung, and through the gloom
The candles cast a lurid-lighting gleam
Adown the street where hurried hoof-beats fell.
So through the dark he, quicker-spurring, rode
Until the lights of Croynan Hall were bright
Embossed before. Slow ambling on, he passed
The gate, and reached the barn whose bending roof
And rafters rude enshrined the golden grain
When sullen Winter came. Within the loft
The heavy-headed sheaves lay intertwined
In roughly heaped array. The yellow corn,
In stately shocks, o'erlooked the fields below,
Where stacks of straw and ricks of ripened hay
Were carelessly outspread. Within the fold
The sheep were safely penned, and gratefully
The gentle kine were munching in their stalls.
The portly swine lay grunting in content,
And lustily at ease the horses rolled
On beds of straw. The pullet leered and churred

And blinked upon the creaking roost, and faint
The cockerel exhaled his hoarse good-night.

The hour oppressive seemed ; the winds were dead ;
The last, faint note of twilight vanishing
Returned and wavered down the valley-lands
Amongst the cloudy sepulchres of day.
A brooding silence overhung the bawn
And permeated all his soul as soon
Did Aubrey turn to meet the manor's light
Diffused in double gloom. The winds arose
And waved the branches of the leafless trees.
All silently the mists had crept afar
Into the lucent solitudes of night.
Sharp, then, and cold the biting north wind fell,
And faint, as Aubrey crossed the corridor,
He saw the first white flakes of early snow
That fluttered to the ground, bejewelling
The wintry air. He shook the clinging down
From off his habit gray ; re-stamped his feet
And left the spacious hall ; and entering
The parlor's curtained gloom, beheld the flames
Upon the hearth a cheery twilight make
Within the queer, old-fashioned room. He seemed

A guest whose welcome custom had assured,
Who needed not the praise that Flattery
Bestows whene'er her favors fall on hearts
Of lesser worth. With careless confidence,
Of long association born, he drew
A chair within the mantel's changing light,
New-stirred the coals, and chafing warmed his hands
Above the gleeds that crackled to the sky
In glorious career. Scarce he had marked
The quicker flame ere Croynan's lord aside
The rustling curtain drew and, entering,
With heavy tread and open, outstretched hand,
His greeting gave with hearty English cheer;
Spake of the crops and rumors of the war,
And hoped that peaceful counsels might prevail—
His interests were knit to either side.
Meanwhile, his guest would entertainment find
Until his daughter deemed herself prepared
To meet a friend who dared a frosty night,
A wintry ride, to keep a promise made.
“But then, perhaps, the storm had not begun
When you reined Steeple at the Grange?” he asked;
And laughed to hear the stammering reply
The youth returned—a vague apology:

He heeded not the purport of his words;
His truant thoughts were otherwise engaged.
The elder smiled: "Such truth no pardon needs"—
Unconscious, Croynan neared the frieze and stood
Before a massive portraiture whose gold
Seemed gaudy by the face so fair portrayed.
Can poet's skill depict his reveries
As there he saw the unforgotten face
Whose girlish beauty claimed his errantry?
What dreams of English hall and hedges green
Enthralled his inmost soul; what vision dim
Of one low grave beneath the hemlock trees;
What image, too, of ever-sparkling eyes
And merry, laughing lips; what tender thought
Of her who lived—and died—to give them birth?

But now adown the passage came the sound
Of swiftly-tripping feet. Unheralded
By stately form, or custom's senseless pride
That mars the wearer's worth, the maiden left
The winding stair and saw the mirror high
Reflect her smiling-featured face. So sweet
Her gleaming portrait glanced, the candles dim
That decked the way her beauty seemed to know,

And paled in self-reproach. The very air
Her presence owned and breathed its whisperings
Remote; a freshness followed in her path
Like odors in the Spring when Morning shows,
To sate her pride, a scene ineffable.
So like the dawn the maiden came and met
Her father's guest with girlish-pictured grace
And womanly reserve.

But tardily

The evening closed. The hours crept slowly by,
Whilst Aubrey and his host discussed the strife
That foremost filled their minds, till hastily,
On vain pretence of papers to be signed
And letters writ to meet the morrow's mail,
The elder slipped away. His step was heard
Upon the stair and ringing through the hall,
Where deep in studious delight he sat
Absorbed in poring o'er the legends traced
In antique folios, long handed down
By careful precedent, and thus become
A part of household pride.

Meantime the storm

Without the manor's cheerful warmth had piled
The windows high with banks of shifting snow.
The falling flames, half-hesitant, had held
Their beauty screened in virgin modesty,
But for some solitary gust that fanned
The embers into brighter blaze and flared
Again each knotted tree that long had lain
In winter forests far among the hills
And valleys of the north. No jesting word
The sleeping silence broke; for times there are
Too sacred-souled for ordinary speech;
And strange, indeed, two lives so nearly shaped,
Two hearts so different! But fate will work
Its fantasies at will. A spurting brand
A sound of music made—a symphony
Of things inanimate—and either breathed
And fearful-moving turned; and, turning, spake
With studied care and feigned formality
Of all that restless gossip had declared
Of genuine account. No doubtful tale
Could seem to them obscure when evidence
Of certain truth was easily supplied
By circumstantial skill. No bulky briefs

Unravelling could satisfy the court
Of equity and right; for judge was clerk
And jury—yea, and prosecutor, too.
Within that fire of criticism stern
No country house for miles around was spared
Its part of scandal dished to suit the place
And circumstance. So carpingly they talked
Until the youth with laughing face bewailed
The boasted depths of woman's charity
And disposition sweet. Whereat the maid
With half a smile looked up and quickly said:
“But you forget that man is still the cause
Of all that we decry.” “And not your name
Is proof against its dark reproach,” the youth
Replied, and shortly stopped, as if he wished
The words unsaid; for, angry-toned, consumed
With passion half-repressed, the maiden rose
And turned, and bit her lip and cried: “No good
Can come from such a theme. So let it rest.
You quite forget that truth is hardly sweet
To those whom it condemns—that thought your mind
Must give me credit for.” So running on,
She glanced at every topic of the day,
And touched on battle, dearth and pestilence;

And lightly spake of Reginald the stern,
And, laughing, said: "Our captain terrible
Of volunteers is following the moose
By dreary Kennebec, or bartering
His moccasins—a dish inebriant
With cedar trimmed and maple. Fare as rich
Could hardly tempt a Vere de Vere to brave
The terrors of a winter wilderness.
You love too well your level fields, your hearths
And English ease; no higher thought than how
To win the most of pleasure from the thing
You call your life can claim your errantry.
No! No! Be still, and let me have my say—
Your gentlemanly birth cannot deny
Me this—you must admit that I am right,
That now your place had better been abroad
Than sitting here and drowsing in your chair—
The sport of half the countryside—a man,
Indeed, but scarce a Vere de Vere!" Breathless
She paused and, gasping, laughed: "Why do you start
And stare as if you now beheld a ghost?
The mantel seems attractive to your sight—
And pray, what fields of honor do you see
Within the flames upon the open hearth?

Some dream of love with kisses on the green—
A worthy theme for Aubrey Vere de Vere
When England's flag lies trampled in the dust
And on the wall his father's sword is sheathed!"
“Perhaps your words are true: I cannot well
Deny that life to me is sweet and full
Of every pleasantness. With you beside,
The roughest island of a winter sea
Might lure the great Ulysses to his doom.
But breathe it not, nor think that noble thoughts
Can find in me no customary place:
I have not sunk so low, nor quite forget
The honor of my name. That little part
Of pride I, still retaining, hold unchanged
Above the sordid trifles of to-day.
So, in my heart, whilst hardly truth you traced,
I almost thanked you for that bitter scene
Of selfish indolence and gross regard.
We seldom match ourselves in colors worse
Than those that Nature forces us to own.”
Thus, half in earnest, half in jest, he spake,
And, rising, said: “Since my poor company
Is now no longer welcomed here, I will
No more upon your privacy intrude.”

Then, noticing the look of vague alarm
Upon the maiden's face, resuming spake
In milder tones, but roguish therewithal:
"An honor won must bring some little pain;
Such bitter change is but a soldier's lot.
I fear my new-found title suits me well
In all that baser appertains. Come! Let
Us say adieu in true and proper style."
And suited to the word he downward bent
And touched the maiden's shrinking lips
In one quick-stolen kiss. Then, smiling still
Upon her sweet embarrassment, regained
The massive threshold, white with fallen snow,
And vanished in the gloom.

His charger loosed
And curveting did Aubrey homeward turn.
Slow-riding through the biting cold, he saw
The maiden standing in the misty light.
Around her feet the fleckled moonbeams fell,
And o'er her head the candles threw a ring
Of crimson-mottled flame. The great hall-doors
Incessant swung unnoticed in the wind
That played the curls about her cheek. Her eyes

Were sweet and radiant with new-found hope,
And every glance revealed the starting tears.
One moment, then, stayed Aubrey Vere de Vere,
And curbed the passion of his champing steed.
With boyish reverence he bowed his head
In anxious wonderment and, soul-abashed,
Loosed rein and hurried through the sifting snow
That overcast the hills of Moringworth.
All silently he rode, and once, by chance,
He turned, but saw no trail or beaten drift
To mark his way or point from whence he came.

IV.

SOON had the rider reached his homeward goal.
All night in troubled thought did Aubrey pace
His chamber floor. The morning came, the storm
Its fury ceased; the firelight fell, but still
He heard the words that seared his soul with doubts
And fears expressionless. Right well he knew
The meaning of the hour—the secret pain
And calumny of change; but clearer yet
With kindled eyes he saw the future bright
With hope and filled with every pleasantness

That life and health and happiness could bring.
Within his reach the prize of fortune stood,
And niggard Time his boasted plenty gave.
Surpassing sweet the by-ways of his youth
Appeared—the long-associated minds
And friendships doubly dear. All, all were his;
And yet, must he forget the name that once
His father bore with such unconquered pride;
For this must he forsake the land that heard
From baby lips their first untutored want?
And were it so, would he regret or plead
It otherwise—for what had he to leave?
A sickly sentiment, forsooth, a thing
To flash and fade away, or be recalled
At will; and England, what was England then?
An island of the sea, no more; to him
A recollection faint and undefined,
A pleasing memory at most. But why
Delay? Could he be aught than what he was
And live at peace within? If that were all,
'Twere best to shape his ends for present use,
To mock the hour and mastery of Time
And drain the dregs of rich extravagance.
But if, perchance, this little sphere were formed

For greater things; if this to-night were born
Of Time to bring us endless day, in worlds
Beyond our mortal ken could he recall
His sordid self and meet with open heart
And hand his father's beckoning? Away
The thought! Nay, better far that wealth should
cease,

And love and living pass, ere pain should dim
Those flashing eyes that from their stationed frame
Upon the chamber wall looked down unchanged,
Immovable, upon his quandary.

One moment, then, with hesitating feet
Did Aubrey stand irresolute. The day
Appeared, and soul-victorious he turned,
Strong-girt with bold resolve, his manhood's part
Revealed and future possibilities
Apparent in his step. Enfeebled, faint,
But conquering, he laid him down to rest,
And thus, at ease, his limbs relaxing stretched
In sleep's refreshing calm.

When he arose
The Sun his crescent course had scaled and sunk
In silence down beneath his noonday throne.

The snow had disappeared, and here and there,
Beneath some fringing hill, the stainless sky
Reflected lay on streams that, bubbling, oozed
Across the sandy loam in courses strange
And slow and tortuous. Short stay he made
To count the freshened beauties of the day
Or wait the coming hours of night. With mind
Untrammelled, every thought was occupied
With manners, means and needs immediate,
And every carking care that inly claimed
His first attention. Strong he seemed and full
Of hope. He saw his plans encompassed crowned,
And presently to servants, gathering
In ill-concealed alarm, explaining showed
His changing course and full direction gave
Should his return be long delayed or checked
By subtle, cheating Chance. Nor longer stayed
Than hard necessity required. Behind
The dark-lined manor loomed, and hurriedly
He reined his horse along the trail that led
To Croynan Hall. The mountain-twisted paths
Were sentinelled by lofty chestnut trees
That massive stood and tall beneath the tent
Of silver-circled clouds that draped the sky

Where ragged hills appeared. Unconsciously
At times did Aubrey turn and strain his eyes
To catch the lights that faded with the hour
Upon the meadow lands. The falling night
Engulfed each sheltered plain, and through the cuts
He quicker spurred until the colonnades
Of Croynan Hall upshadowing arose
Like phantoms grizzled, grim and motionless.
Along the paths and withered lawns he urged
His lagging charger's speed, and carefully
Implored a shelter for the night and saw
The hostler at his task ere he himself
In silence sought the portals of the Hall.

Soon, strong and glad of heart, but filled with thought
Presentiment of ill, did Aubrey speak
The purpose of his mind, and to his host
Explain his course and strong decision made,
And crave indulgence of his friend. Perchance
The elder caught some glimpses of his youth
In Aubrey's wild knight-errantry; perhaps
His inmost heart was true; for pleased he seemed,
Nor reticent, to grant or promise all
That might be asked for old acquaintance sake;

Though, secretly amused, he held the thing
A pleasing jest of little ill or good.
As for himself, he said, he did not deem
It wise to preach abroad his loyalty.
“The situation had peculiar been.”
His life was not his own to use; the will
Was his, but not the circumstance to do
The thing his heart had pressed him to, and more;
The cause was still indefinite and wronged
By popular repute. To speak the truth—
His interests were here, but not the ties
That held his soul enthralled. He did not wish
To compromise his dearest friends by acts
Of open enmity to either side;
And Aubrey, too, he hoped, would hesitate
Ere forfeiting his own neutrality.
But here the daughter came, surprised, at least,
To meet her visitor so quick returned
And deep-engaged in conversation grave.
To whom, in softened tones, the elder spake:
“Can you persuade this gentleman to act
As half becomes a man of sense? Perhaps
Your words will be of more avail than mine.”
Then, smiling, told of Aubrey’s errantry,

Determination made since yesternight.
Whom answering, the maid at length replied:
“Have I the right to change his will—and would
I if I could? Who knows?” Thus, echo-like,
Her answer gave and musingly approached.

Around the grate, in careless circle formed,
The trio sat, whilst father, daughter, guest,
In turn discussed the dangers of the way,
Explained the routes, and counsel gave of time
And place, and whatsoever wisest seemed,
Ere Aubrey rose to say good-night and make
His last farewell. Remaining for a trice,
As loth to leave, with shy confusion sweet
The maiden paused and said: “Forgive me, pray;
I did not mean the half of what I said
The other night.” But Aubrey cried: “So soon?
And yet I did not say that you were wrong
In what you did. The morrow judges all.”
And hastily he turned, as men afraid,
That bravely venture forth, lest presently
Their bolstered courage fail.

When he awoke

The rooms were still. With cautious tread he crept
To rouse his host and leave his messages
Of thanks. With ready courtesy embraced,
His every want was satisfied by those
Who heard his needs to have his wishes done.
Now chill his charger whinnied at the door—
And he was gone. A heavy mist o'erhung
The plains and screened from view the lower hills
As Aubrey spurred his freshened steed and left
The trails that marked the boundaries of home.
Anon the sun with fiery-featured face
Above the mountains crept. The skies were clear.
Far through a cut, as Aubrey cantered by,
He saw the plains of Moringworth. The air
Was crisp, and pleasant lay the meadow-lands.
Above the manor's roof the rising smoke
About the chimneys curled, and lazily
The cattle strolled along the wooded lanes
In single file, or lashed with angry snorts
The river's placid calm. One moment more,
And it was past, this fleeting glimpse of home;
But burned in Aubrey's soul indelibly,
With every mile he made it seemed to grow
Proportionate; and silently he rode.

V.

MEANTIME, through wilds and rocks declivitous,
Had Reginald o'ertrud the barren wastes
Of Kennebec's domain; and hunger known,
And pain and sickness seen; and tempest, snow,
And pestilence endured without complaint,
Or base reproach. Far up the broad expanse
The rough New England voyageurs propelled
Their light canoes against the restless whirl
Of waters in the chill autumnal rains;
And touched the shore—to fire the brush in vain
And lie by night upon the sodden ground;
And early wake, and ever northward sail
Until the portages were past and bright
Before them lay the shining Chaudière.

Beyond the barriers of old Quebec,
The Standard flew above the citadel.
The silent sentry paced his tireless way
About the lower town. The Winter came
And whirling rolled the drifted snow on hill
And plain and valley-land; but undismayed
By Nature's wrath or grim embrasure's frown,

The bold besiegers nearer drew their lines
Of musketeers, and wearily maintained
Their watch, and dreamed betimes of home. At length
The night appointed came; the signals burned
A livid red, and up their armies charged
On Stadacona's height. The blinding sleet
In eddies shrilled and screamed on summits high;
The dreaded sound of hurried feet awoke
The city's rest, and Montmorency's Fall
Retold the wakened cannon's roar and roll
Of musketry. In secret ambush trapped,
Their leaders slain and half their comrades lost,
The shattered troops in wild confusion quailed,
And like a stream, its April ravage o'er,
Half-sullenly recoiled.

Ere long the Spring,
In beauty clothed, the old St. Lawrence woke
From his hibernal sleep. The English ships,
With canvas squared, far up the river sailed.
The blue Laurentian hills their sombre garb
Retook and still the Crimson Ensign flew
Above the hills and valleys of the north.
Returning thence did Reginald behold

The streets of Moringworth. A little group
About the corner stood astonished, mute
And open-mouthed. Upon their countenance
Appeared surprise and wonder envy-turned
With malice ill-concealed. There, questioning,
Did Reginald delay, and, nearing, read
In black, unchanging characters inscribed
And undersealed.

To Whom It May Concern—
Take Heed that Aubrey Vere de Vere, unsought,
Hath levied war against our Commonwealth
And joined our enemies to waste our fields
And lay our homesteads low. So Be It Known
That all his lands are confiscated, he
Himself by treason's law unaltering
Proscribed, on pain of death forbidden these,
Our boundaries.

The creeping shadows fell ;
The looming letters passed before his eyes
And all their subtle-figured meaning came.
With nervous, knotted hands he screened his face
As from Contagion's sight. “ Is this the end ?

Is this the end?" he cried in agony,
And staggered on his way; but still his heart
In helpless terror moaned: "Is this the end?"

And Arthur Croynan came and, like the rest,
The proclamation read and read again;
And beamed on those around, and quite approved
The government's resort to measures marked
By such severity; then went his way
To make his soul-destroying boast that he,
At least, was free from honor-circled loss
And suffering. So, first but scarcely seen,
His face grew cold, his wealth became a part
Of him; his better love was lost for love
Of gain, and he, beholding sorrow, passed
With lip of scorn, or, pausing, spake of lack
Of thrift or waste of opportunity,
Till every breath was hated by the poor
Who dwelt upon his lands and saw his home
And happiness.

But Reginald pursued
His journey's end. One little glimpse of home
Renewed the memories of old; and on

He rode with heavy heart, and in his soul
A sense of loss and unrequited pain.

VI.

THE oft-recurring seasons grudgingly
One miser's glint of precious sunshine bore:
Far from the distant clash of arms the deeds
Of Reginald Design had cheered the streets
Of Moringworth; but now no tidings came
Of him who in that battle of the south
His countrymen had led.

Of Aubrey, too,
At times the storm-staid traveller would speak;
And like an echo from the forest came
The story of his triumph, with the tale
Of his adventures in the pleasant fields
And meadows and the wigwams of the west.
Now conquering and conquered, too, he turned
Again to Moringworth. His hair unkempt
Was streaked with lines of artificial gray, his face
By wind and rain and varied fortunes tinged;
With deepest tan; his palsy-tottered steps

Unsteady, slow and painfully pursued.
In deep disguise, with awkward-mannered mien,
With quaking voice and clothes by travel stained,
He neared the colonnades of Croynan Hall.
Its mistress, glancing from her garden-seat,
Beheld his toilsome-shambled gait with looks
Of interest and faint surprise expressed
In every lighting motion of her face,
That for a moment watched a sight so strange
And unaccustomed in her cool retreat.
Familiar seemed the listless, breaking voice
That craved an evening's rest; and like some dream
Delusive, dim and phantom-like, the words
Of muttered thanks some chord responsive woke
That brimmed her eyes with hot, unbridled tears.
The great red Sun, in autumn glory crowned,
Beneath the far horizon sloping fell.
The crimson-circled hills retained the hours
Of slow-receding day. The cool night air,
Amongst the maples, rustled every leaf
That idly fluttered in the rising wind
And sang the song of all mortality.
Depressed by Nature's storm-foreshadowing calm,
A flood of questions, doubts and fears perplexed

Her mind as Ethel Croynan turned her steps
In silence through the fast-approaching dusk.
No happy, starting thought could solace bring
To smooth the troubled courses of her soul.
With ghostly tread the long, uncounted years
In wild confusion trooped tumultuous—
A panorama glistening with days
Whose future prospect had no faculty
To please. So half-unconsciously, it seemed,
She neared the place where, unconcerned and lost
In careless reverie, the stranger sat
And blew the clouds that from his rusty pipe
He drew at intervals; but courteous
He turned to meet the lady's step and hear
Her words of kind solicitude expressed.
Who presently the news inquired, and spake
Of Reginald Design: Had any seen
His men of late? His whereabouts—perhaps
The traveller could tell? Ah, yes! He knew
The name—a man no pleasure ever turned
From Duty's hard command; no sacrifice
He deemed too great for those he called his own—
A nobleman indeed. And Aubrey, too?
In truth he did not need the “Vere de Vere”

To recognize that pestilential curse
And foulest blot upon their country's fame;
And would have stopped; but noticing the look
Upon the lady's face, indignantly
Resumed: " You start? and yet I do but speak
What little children prattle in their play.
A ruthless man is Aubrey Vere de Vere,
And one no tender impulse ever thrills.
A traitor's life he leads, and soon will meet
A death deserved, when Time's avenging hand
Shall lay his blood-stained banners low. No stone,
By loving fingers raised, shall mark his place
Of rest; no stifled cries of parting pain
Shall guide his soul upon its journey's end;
But o'er his grave the crumbled walls, that mark
His wasted path, bespeak their enmity!"
Reservedly he paused, whilst she, with eyes
Wide-open, half-amused, her answer gave:
" An actor are you? Aubrey Vere de Vere—"
The words in haunting echoes drifted down
The avenues of youth—and he was glad;
For she was his—and living sweet. Then twice
He drew her to his side, and felt her breath
Upon his cheek and knew their pulses beat

In unison ; and happy with the love
Of life, her features kissed ; and laughing held
Her close and saw the tears that filled her eyes ;
And touched her hair, and spake her name, and kissed
Her once again farewell ; then went his way,
But little knew the misery and loss
That like avenging fate would follow hard.

For other ears had overheard those words
Of sweet surprise, and other eyes had seen
That figure's rough attire, and gazed with looks
Of curious concern upon a scene
So strange. A common serving-man he was
Who chanced to pass and see and understand ;
Then, burdened with the news, informed his friends,
Who, nothing loth, received his confidence,
And babbling tipped their fellows in carouse.
So, ere the morrow came, an angry crowd,
On vengeance bent, about the portals swayed
And surged, and louder cried their owner forth.
Nor called in vain ; for soon, with heavy tread
And haughtier address, he came, and bowed
And begged the meaning of that great surprise.
Nor waited long. An angry shout their will

Proclaimed—and questions fierce: Was Aubrey there?
A quick denial came; but useless words—
Can reason prove to those who reason not?
A sullen murmur rose. The curious
In jostling circles closed; the shivered glass
With noisy clatter fell. Whilst one might breathe
The mob recoiled; then ruthless, rash, and filled
With revelous desire inordinate,
Across the oaken threshold, cursing, crushed
In unavailing search; and finding not,
In brute chagrin its fury loosed; depraved
With long debauch, unsteadily the torch
In angry mood applied, and shrieked with glee
To see the flames amongst the timbers creep
And jetty high on pinnacled designs
Or warp the canvases of ages past,
That hissed and curled amidst the crackling heat
And seemed to mock their owner's mute appeal.
The weary night, in drunken orgy spent,
Consumed itself away. The morning came;
The leaden sky above the ruins black
In heavy silence hung and lightened not.
Hard, pitiless and cold, the driving rain
In drenching torrents fell; and homeless, sad
And destitute, the wanderers went forth.

VII.

THE still autumnal twilight tarrying
Upon the Hudson lay; and cautiously
Amongst its wooded ways, with eye alert
And stealthy step, strode Aubrey Vere de Vere.
His feet untiring moved, and cheerfully
He trod each hidden trail. For hard beyond
The ramparts owned the flag to England dear—
The flag that still unsullied floats on sea
And shore immensurate—The flag that yet
A fortress finds in hearts of Englishmen!
Ah! There a welcome would await; for crowns
Unsought were his, and not a child but lisped
His name and rode again each midnight raid
In warlike mimicry.

The falling night

In settled gloom o'erspread each sheltered shore.
The mists rolled westward with the rising sea
And mingled with the darkness interlaced
In shapes fantastic, vague and undefined—
Protean forms illusive in the dusk
That, hour by hour increasing, darkened down.

Soon, silent-slanting through the murky air,
The waning crescent flamed beneath the clouds
That overcast the sightless hours of day,
And down the margined vapors floating slipt
In molten imagery. Below it lay
The plain-encircled forest and the clumps
That stretched for miles beyond the city's pale
Like Druid shrines, or ornaments of Death,
So clustered, still and altar-like they stood
Upon the cool savannah's grassy glebe.

Here Aubrey came, and crossed with quickened care
The intervening space from wood to wood.
At times he halted, and a wild desire
To break the murky stillness of the night
Enveloped all his soul; for by some art
Of subtle worth he felt another near.
His ear was strained to every trifling sound;
A leaflet fell, and thrice his musket came
To rest, and sank in silence echoless.
A step; and see—his eye is undeceived!
The gleaming moonlight, glancing, flared a form
Of continental gray; and carefully
Deliberate he glided through the brake

And disappeared amongst the trees. Ensconced
Behind the screening bulwark of an oak,
He fixed his eyes upon the winding trail
As if he fain would pierce the heavy mists
That deepened in the gloom like cloud on cloud.
With hunter's craft he poised his rifled steel
And forward leaned with eager, lifted hand.
With savage skill imbued, he marked the course
The rebel scout must take to reach the paths
That led in safety from the British lines.
His fingers twitched upon the burnished breech
When suddenly, as if from danger freed,
And thus the singer needs must show his joy,
A ballad drifted down the clinging air
And died amongst the echoes that it raised—
A twilight tale from fair New Hampshire's hills.
Mute, conquered then stood Aubrey Vere de Vere.
The musket, falling, clattered at his feet;
The sweeping forest swayed before his eyes,
Tear-dimmed with pleasant memories of home;
For often he had heard those siren strains
Around the crackling hearths of Croynan Hall,
And well he knew the voice of Reginald.

In silence then stood Aubrey Vere de Vere,
Half-hesitating still to breathe the name
He yearned to speak; for many things were plain
That hitherto had been obscured and thralled
In mystery and doubt. Full well he knew
The years had brooked no sluggard in their flight,
And heeded not the landmarks of the past.
E'en there he paused, and shuddered at the thought
Of change; the old life conquered—and he spake.

Thus, friends unfriendly, near at hand they stood,
While Reginald, recounting, told the tale
Of his retreat; the treachery that marked
His doom on Camden's fatal field, where he
Alone had ranked his troops and sought to stay
The rout; how, broken by the craven crowd,
That crushed his ordered line, he strove in vain
To form his men and turn the British flank
Where, flashing in the morning-silvered sun,
The sabres shone o'er bright accoutrements
Of war, and wheeling on his shattered wing
The snaffle-clanking squadrons overthrew
His cringing cavalry. Companionless,
He saw the early comrades of his youth

Engulfed in panic-stricken regiments
That fled defenceless in their coward flight.
In vain he strove to check that wild retreat;
Alone he faced the terror-driven throng,
But found no kindred spirit there, as down
Beneath a dastard-given stroke he sank
Amongst the piles of slain. Another year
Had rolled the cryptic circle of its course;
Again the Autumn crowned his sceptred sway
As Reginald, with bated breath, recalled
The sultry days upon the livid hulks
That reeked with misery and death. Unmoved,
He looked on life and liberty; so much
His spirit's pride was broken in its fall
That sweet security could bring no words
To light his speech with thoughts despondent framed.
Meanwhile they reached the deeper wood, and high
Upon a brambled ness reclining leaned,
Beneath the breaking clouds that half-revealed
The bosky labyrinth below. Far-off
The city showed resurgent through the night,
And faint the water's rippling wash was heard
Upon the yellow sands that girt the shore
Where, massive-limned, an English frigate lay,
With spars outlined against the drifting tide.

Arm-proped against a moss-encircled oak,
As Aubrey next of varied fortunes spake,
His soul was saddened by the thought that he
To these dear scenes was lost forevermore;
That ne'er again his eyes would look with pride
On furrowed fields that now were tenantless;
That nevermore their lips should fill the night
With happy airs or tales of daring deeds
By boyish confidence endowed with life
And attributes of Time. With labored breath,
As if the words were new to speech, he told
How, succorless, the British stood at bay,
Their armies broken and their leaders slain
By dint of overwhelming odds supplied,
Through hate of ancient feud, by alien tongues
That feared alone to face their foe. At most,
A year would mark a continental corps
Beyond those heavy-ranging hills where then
They trod on English earth and overlooked
Her battlements.

Ah! who can know the thoughts
That filled the soul of Reginald Design
As there he made the sacrifice that marks

A man of nobler worth than reeking shard
Or blood-red panoply of dark revenge.
The master's mind of hero's part was his,
Who then would turn the bitterness of strife
Aside, and reap no glory from renown,
Lest thus his hand, too proud, might undermine
The slender pinnacle of peace that far
Before him loomed—a lofty minaret
Erected o'er the crumbled hopes of Time.
Nor these could friendship's cherished rights restrain;
With eager words and love-ekindled eye,
Unreckoning of anger, calumny
And change, did Reginald recall the hours
When secretly their lips had plighted faith.
Their lives, unlinked, had drifted far apart.
The years had brought no echoes of the past,
And other faces, other aims, had filled
Their aching hearts. But now, if Peace regained
Her battled sway, their lives should know the friends
Of old; for generously great, the strength
Of Liberty enthroned invoked no curse
On those of other mould, who once had mocked
Her rising power. Aubrey, smiling, spake:
A glimpse of boyhood crossed his rugged face

And lingered on his trembling lips—a ghost
Of careless, happy days swift-vanishing:
“ The Nemesis of hope is in its loss
And gradual decay; and Liberty,
In wild excess confirmed, will quaff the full
Of Fate’s extravagance.” And scarce had paused
Ere Reginald with flashing eye returned:
“ The memories of home can conquer pride,
The life—” But Aubrey, interrupting, cried:
“ Enough! Here tempt me not again; I am
But weak as others are, and yet may fail
Where now I stand in fortitude secure.
Think not to win a bruised and bleeding heart
With empty words or promises of gain;
Where honor leads, and once the sword is drawn,
The world must mark no turning back through fear
Of baneful consequence. Nay, Reginald,
The sum of love doth sordid folly prove,
If, loving thus, we lose our nobler aims
In smaller things. Let us not build a hope
But doomed to death; our ways are far apart
And meet not in their time-appointed course.
To me your life is but a name, and mine
To you no more than rumors of the wood,

That chance hath brought unkindly to your ear.
We are but echoes of our former selves :
Soul-centred in one all-absorbing aim,
We play our parts and live our lives unheard
Save in the cosmic blending of the whole,
As mingled notes in legends of the spheres
Are traced by gods and men divinely born.
Oft have our arms in deadly conflict crossed
Whilst those once friends have one another slain
In fratricidal strife, and, dying thus,
Have then a heritage of hate bequeathed
To us, their followers. But, Reginald—
For still that name its early charm retains—
If aught of ancient friendship can avail
To hide the faults that love would fain have made
A monument sublime ; if pleasant hours,
Long hidden in the half-remembered past,
Can resurrect a tear to eyes that know
But strength and manliness ; if love is blind
To things it should not look upon—again
The old life here may find itself enthroned ;
And we may feel as we have felt before,
And clasp our hands—and breathe a last farewell.”

So saying, they had reached a sheltered cove
Where, all but hidden, lay a light canoe
Beneath a drooping canopy of fern.
With fingers skilled by long-accustomed use,
The birchen bark did Aubrey designate
As voyaging on peaceful errand bent;
And warnings gave of channels to avoid
And guarded paths beyond the British lines
Where cowboys from the south did congregate
In devastating bands. Soon they had gained
The pebbled beach beneath the fringing wood
Whose willowed pale upholds each mossy bank
In seething snows and ravages of Spring.
With scarce a sound, the waters breaking lapped
Their feet in long, receding swells. Half-launched,
With prow afloat, soft-swayed the light canoe
With every rippling wave, as birds, new-fledged,
That fain would fly, widespread each timid wing
And flutter to their wind-tossed nests again
In momentary peace. Their hearts were full,
And neither spake; for either knew that now
They stood above the brink of life's abyss,
And from that hour their parting should be made.
For one should live a traitor in the land he loved,

Or die an exile on some distant shore,
In crowded streets or trackless solitudes
Remote from fair New Hampshire's huddled hills.
No limpid phrases passed between them there,
Nor garnished words that hide but cold disdain.
Silent did Reginald depart, and thus,
Unthanked, did Aubrey pay his manhood's due.
Long stood he in the starlight glimmering
And watched the paddle break above the trail
That lay like silver on the moonlit stream.
There, swaying at the great untrod divide,
No kindred hand to beckon or sustain
If thus his feet should falter in the way,
Before him loomed, as in a mirror dim,
With mists arising from a summer sea,
The things that were and now could be no more—
The pleasures gone and hopes forever dead
With lives that now no longer life should know.
So passed the night. The cold, gray morning fell
And faint and fainter grew the silver path
Beyond the river's verge. The west winds breathed
Amongst the overhanging trees; but still
Upon the beach stood Aubrey Vere de Vere
And all the treasured lines of one sweet face

A happy peace about his being drew,
And o'er him rolled the fullness of desire.

VIII.

UNFALTERING did Aubrey make his way
Along the winding reaches of the shore.
Before him lay the city, half-engulfed
In crimson-arrowed mist; behind him stretched
The valleys of New York, and far beyond,
In shadowy embrace, the hills enshrined
The sanctuary of his soul, the Light
And Heaven of his hope. But little time
Remained for future plans, or vain regrets;
For safe the drowsy sentinels were past,
And, sick at heart, he trod the noisy street
And saw the gaping rabble close, and heard
His praises sung by those who little thought
Him near; then hurried on through avenues
Deserted, hard by thistle-tufted lawns
And lines of drifting furze, and thus the news
Of close investment brought to him who held
The city in command. So there enforced,
His soldier quarters took; but ill at ease,

And tired of inactivity, he sought
A band of kindred souls, and ranging rode
In midnight cavalcades.

The Autumn passed.
And soon the surly-visaged Winter brought,
Enveloping the hills in mantled gray,
Imprisoning the streams with icy hands;
And still no tidings half-expected came
From Moringworth.

Ere long appeared the first
Faint tokens of returning Spring. The air
Was sweet with odors of the day; the wind
Blew softly from the south; each early bud
Its tinselled keeper cast; the songsters cooed
And carolled in the wood; the waters rose
And fell, and sounds innumerable lent
Their harmony divine. The white-winged ships,
With exiles crowded, bound for distant lands,
In endless train across the harbor drew.
Upon the dock half crumbled in decay
Stood Aubrey Vere de Vere. Around him surged
The throng of heavy-hearted travellers

Whose words dejected reminiscent grew.
The latest vessel seaward straining groaned
And battled with the deep. High in the shrouds
He heard the sailors shouting at their tasks,
And, little-thinking, down the gangway stepped.
Unmanacled, the ship reluctant lay;
A tremor through the timbers crept. The creak
Of cordage came—a sound of rising wind,
The noise of cables swishing on the quay.
One moment, leaning by the rail, he watched
The silver-crested waters slip away.
The lapping wavelets rippled down below,
The canvas bulged above, and, tremulous
In every beam, the vessel gathered speed
And shook her spars as Arab coursers sniff
The scent of battle, eager for the fray.
A common grayness glimmered round; the sun
Made half a circle in the night, and pale
As Death the moon went sailing overhead.
No burning thought of bitter parting came.
A sleep-compelling silence covered all:
The sea, the ship, the city fading seemed
A dream and something gone before. He felt
Himself at rest and trustful as a child.

There seemed to be an end of time; of that
To come he hardly paused to think. He saw
The writhing shadows sweep across the waves,
And slow, expectant turning, recognized
The one sweet face that through the vanished years
His memory unaltering retained.

Beside the mast the maiden stood and smiled
A happy welcoming. As natural
Her presence seemed as though through centuries
For this all-consummating hour decreed
The tangled threads of their existence drew.

Upon the deck they sat, beneath the roof
Of Night's gray canopy, illumined yet
With orange-tinted shafts still glimmering.

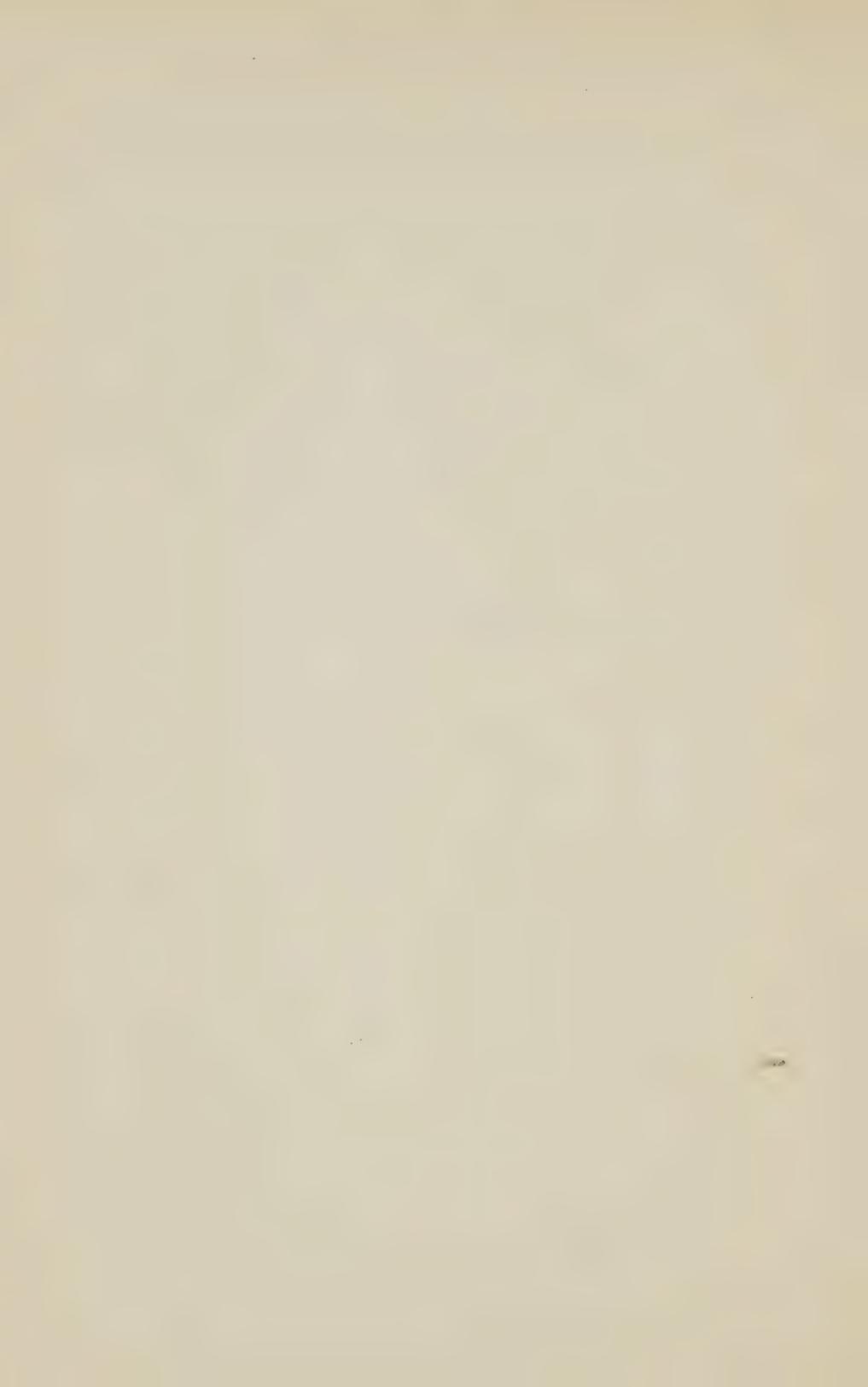
A pleasing peace the rising south-wind blew.

Soft-whispering, the maiden told of all
That chanced at Moringworth: how, driven forth,
From friend to friend importunate they came
Till, last-delaying, thither Reginald
Had brought them news of Aubrey Vere de Vere
And generously restitution made
For all her father's loss; who, turning, lived
His former life unthinking of his place.

But she—had trod the path that brought her hope.

Around the ship the sea recumbent lay,
And fair before the twain united stretched
The future clear and cloudless as the sky.
And still the vessel quickened with the wind,
And in the north its pilot star proclaimed
A land of new endeavor, full of hope,
And bright with promises of rich reward.

THE MAID OF THE MASK.



THE MAID OF THE MASK.

THREE centuries and more ago,
(So long the time, I hardly know
In what old town or tumbled burg
The incident, forsooth, occurred),
The Dona Sieta, proud of name,
With prancing steed attended came
To renovate the sculptured pile,
Of ancient build and classic style,
That crowned the city's topmost height,
Like Vesper flashing through the night,
With pillared stair and garden-seat
And fragrant courtyard, cool and sweet,
By lofty wall and terrace bound
From common sight and vulgar sound.

The Baron Sieta, so they say,
A crabbed man, but in his way

A gallant knight, excelling oft
In courtly words and whispers soft,
And ever quick to draw the sword
For love and glory of the Lord,
Had travelled far in foreign lands
And seen the sunset bathe the sands
Upon the shores of Galilee ;
And hard beside the sacred sea,
Had dwelt a hermit in his cell,
Enduring much and dying well.

Before the knight the world forsook,
Renounced the sword for pilgrim's crook.
He placed his daughter, passing nine,
With saintly nuns of Ursuline,
And orders gave that she should fare
As well became her father's heir.
This pious charge the sisters kept
When she awoke and when she slept.
Her slightest wish, whene'er expressed,
Was quickly filled at her behest ;
And waiting-women, falsely kind,
Ransacked the house, in hopes to find

Some newer trinket or surprise
To lure the languor from her eyes.
Her gentle soul with dread eschewed
The tales of hate and endless feud
That filled the pages of her time
With empty prose and florid rhyme.
The world was wrapped in love and praise
That made the long Italian days
A golden Paradise, and best—
A dream of sin-absorbing rest.
The maiden's face was sweet and fair,
Her eyes expressive, soft her hair;
Her voice was resonant and clear,
A sound elusive, far and near.
She seemed perfection 'mid the dross
Of mediaeval cowl and cross
That girt her round on every side
With empty sham and hollow pride.
A spotless robe her limbs embraced;
Exponent of its wearer's taste,
Its clinging folds her form expressed
And half-revealed each budding breast
That every secret charm foretold
In silken settings rich with gold.

The worthy Bishop of Milan
(So commonly the story ran)
Had felt his shrivelled soul expand
When saying masses in the land
Where she had walked and left an air
Of modest sanctity and prayer.

When womanhood its freedom brought,
Reluctantly the lady sought
The antique house upon the hill,
That long had brooded, cold and still,
Above the cottages and halls
Encircled by the city walls.
There masquerades and revels past ;
Their pleasures came and flitted fast,
While through the land with noiseless tread
Destruction stalked and left his dead.
A famine on the people came ;
With wasted flesh and fevered frame
They knelt upon the burning street
And begged their governors for meat.
So full of pity was the scene,
A miser's heart, methinks, would lean

Too generous in its resolve
From biting hunger to absolve
The cringing crowd that cried for bread.
The priests, alone, the faithful fed,
But soon, exhausted their supply,
A proclamation placed on high:
“ That every house with hoarded food
Should yield it for the common good,
And scanty live in equal part
With peaceful mind and humble heart.”
Obedient, the people bore
Their treasured wealth and cellared store
To one great abbey in the town,
Where martyred saints and fathers frown;
But in the mansion on the hill
Was happiness and plenty still.
Its youthful queen, with merry laugh,
Besought her friends the wine to quaff,
Whilst little ones on every side
Unnourished for their mothers cried.

Thus, openly, and void of fear,
The tables groaned with fragrant cheer.

Each lighted taper threw a ray
Athwart the shadows of the day,
And o'er the city cast its light
As distant beacons in the night
Bespeak a haven of retreat
For homeless hearts and weary feet.
The sad violas sobbed their song
With plaintive slide and cadence long,
And smiling dancers caught their breath,
Forgetful of corroding Death,
While subtle flutes their tale prolonged
Of Innocence and Beauty wronged.

Of these delights the rumors ran,
Increasing, too, from man to man,
Till angrily a murmur grew
Against this viper that withdrew
Her treasures from the common weal
And seemed no tenderness to feel.
So, firm-resolved, with strong ^{behest}
The people cried for her arrest.
The lady came with smiling face;
For so bewitching was her grace

The surly churls could scarce approach
Nor on her liberty encroach.
Her charms, forsooth, were hard to stand.
And hardest most when least she planned.
So pure her glance, the slightest look
The strongest charges lightly shook.
In truth, it seemed an evil thing
That men should accusation bring
Against a woman, young and fair,
Who lacked from birth a mother's care,
And now recoiled with open eyes
Of troubled pain and sad surprise.
Thus no accusing voice appeared
To urge the fate the people feared.
At length, by judge and justice freed,
They brought them forth her finest steed,
And led her home in rich estate,
With cavalcades and trappings great.

In course of time ten suitors came
From families of note and name,
And laid their honors at her feet.
Each played the lover—took his seat—

And sought his cherished hopes to press
With courtly words and warm caress.
To such as pleased she bade them stay,
And heard their wooings, day by day,
Till, tired at last of endless talk,
She begged them go—and take a walk
Beneath some cool, sequestered nook
Where sombre owls their vigils took
And creaking bats their sallies made
From secret crannies in the shade.
But why relate and thus prolong
The common tale of such a song?
Each troubadour was inly pleased,
For honeyed words his doubtings eased;
But lulled to rest by drooping eyes,
He woke to find the wished-for prize
Above the circle of his charms,
Beyond the haven of his arms.
So who will wonder when we tell
The dire misfortunes that befell
The suitors of this lady fair?
How portly abbots tore their hair
And cursed themselves in black despair—
How leaner brothers felt the snare

Of this magician's guiltless guile,
Would make a modern heathen smile.
The Duke himself, if fame be true,
Had sought her hand as lovers do
Amidst the glamor of the dance
In gilded pages of romance;
And on the field of mortal fight
Full oft some gallant lord or knight
Had cause to rue the subtle spell
She wrought so sweetly and so well.
Why needs be told how shameful death
Salon and court had left bereft
Of those who led the merry chase
Adown the slopes of Arno Place—
How one dark night the Regent's son
To softly-secret death was done
By noble rivals in the game
Where red-lipped Venus plied the flame?
From her alone dissension came
To wreck the fortune and the fame
Of half the houses in the place.
Consumed with sorrow and disgrace,
The people, crying, cursed the thing
That like a serpent left its sting

Where it displayed its evil charm
Of future pain and deadly harm ;
But, wiser now than e'er before,
Their counsel took with bolted door,
And long and loud maintained their case
As ancient rulers of their race.

Three trusty slaves, at stroke of two,
With secret stealth the deed should do ;
Upon her face impressing hold
An iron mask of hateful mould ;
And weld it there with metal bands,
With well-prepared and hasty hands,
Lest by some chance, yet unforeseen,
A flashing light should make her queen
And them retainers at her feet,
Engaged in reverences meet.

But all was well. ~~At~~ dead of night,
With noiseless step and ruthless might,
They tore the lady from her bed
And quickly from her chamber sped.
Enveloped in a cloak of brown,
They haled her through the sleeping town—

This siren with the magic spell—
And cast her in a prison cell,
Some twenty feet beneath the ground,
Where waiting ears no sweeter sound
Than drops of falling water caught,
That trickled through the channels wrought
By centuries of sunless cold
And weary years of wasting mould.

Now, cursed by some unyielding fate,
Deserted, chill and desolate,
The castle frowned upon the hill.
Its bubbling fountains all were still,
Its pillars crumbled in decay ;
And formerly where gardens lay,
The tall, rank grasses thickly grew
And from their haunts the ravens drew,
That glided o'er each weedy path
Like silent messengers of wrath.
Of secret ill so dark a cloud
The place oppressed that, only cowed,
The traveller would hurry by,
With quickened step and fearful eye,

And freer breathe to see at length
The fallen symbols of its strength.

When eighteen years had hurried past,
And times had changed, and kings at last
The lesson learned that women's tears
Are mightier than swords and spears,
Another ruler took his place
As lord and leader of his race.
From cell to cell he strode and saw
His prisons filled; and by a law,
From ancient custom wrought, decreed
His hostages and convicts freed,
That every soul within the state
Might unreserving celebrate
The glad accession of a king
Who loved this happiness to bring.
Then forthwith came the magistrate,
With men-at-arms and pompous state,
To see the royal orders done.
The burly warders, one by one,
Their prisoners released that they
Might greet their king and pardon pray

For all their unforgiven wrong;
At length they hobbled them along,
Both young and old, and stark and lame;
Benumbed with age and bent with shame,
They begged their boon and stumbled past—
Unmanacled—and free at last.
But one there came of nobler mien,
Whose face, enshrouded and unseen,
Was languid bent; yet by her side,
With some faint sign of former pride,
Outstretched her hand, as if to show
The homage she was wont to know.
The veil aside a servant brushed;
The crowd was stilled, its gossip hushed;
For there, o'erwrought upon her face,
The metal mask retained its place;
Which, strait removed, her features left
Contorted, seared and thus bereft
Of every charm that fortune lent
To her who myriads had sent
To regions of deserted day.
The people shuddered in dismay,
Recoiled in fear and watched the eyes
That flashed with hatred and surprise.

Amidst the features formed to take
The outlines that the maskings make,
And evermore impressed to show
The devil-moulded domino.
The crowd refrained from nearer view,
Or, finer-feeling, backward drew.
Then slowly spake the magistrate,
His mien important and sedate;
With utterance austere and sage,
Distinctive of a sterner age,
He eulogized the matchless grace
Of her, the fairest of her race;
Concluding: “This, her mean estate,
Bespeaks the Hand that men call fate.
Let chivalry and commons hear;
Bow down, ye wise, and learn to fear
The great decrees of God, our King,
Who worketh good from everything.
In each, though mean, some talent lies,
Some rare design, some perfect prize
In form and face, in soul and mind,
That marks him from his kindred kind;
This, rightly used for others’ gain,
Nor spent for pleasure fraught with pain

To those he jostles on the way,
Will prove his comfort and his stay
Amidst the turmoil and the strife
That permeate our lower life ;
But wrought by him to nothing good,
Or left unaltered where it stood,
Though pure, unspotted as when sent
And first to him by Heaven lent,
Can little aid in time of need ;
For He, who ruleth, hath decreed
That blameless life cannot atone
For him who lives for self alone ;
But yielding increase none or small,
The Lord, who giveth, taketh all ;
And lest, of every race the best,
Our blood alone should be at rest,
Let every age and nation know
The justice that His judgments show ;
And lest our children doubting ask,
We leave them here this iron mask,
That, warped and worn and red with rust,
It may proclaim that God is just.”

A TALE OF ROTHENBURG.

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IN Rothenburg the Ancient,
In mediæval days,
Of all the goodly taverns,
That cheered the thirsty ways,

The Rother Hahn the coolest
And goodliest was held
By every doughty drinker
That Bacchus-like excelled.

For centuries it slumbered,
And none disturbed its rest;
And every tippler tasted
The wine he loved the best;

And first of all the worthies,
Who drank the Tauber well,
Was Nusch, the Rother-keeper;
And here is what befell.

The land is all commotion,
The country red with war;
And men are zealous Christians
Who never prayed before.

For Frederick and Luther
The flag is floating high,
And gloomily the watchers
Behold the crimson sky

Where sweep the Roman armies,
With Tilly at their head,
And fetid lie the cities
With corpses of the dead.

Right gallant are the burghers
And gallantly they fall;
But who can conquer Tilly
Or hold the city wall?

On, on they come unflinching,
These bulldogs of the Rhine,
These men who courted danger
And marched with Wallenstein.

Behold! The fort is flying
A signal spotless white,
And through the gates are pouring
The winners of the fight.

On, on they roll unnumbered,
And Tilly rides before
Where brazen clang the trumpets
Before the Rathhaus door.

The senators are seated,
In sombre-suited state,
But forth they step undaunted
To hear the city's fate.

“Come, hang these dogs of Luther,”
The angry marshal cries—
“A stretch of German tether
Will choke their pious lies.”

But tears and lamentations
Make terror in the street—
The noise of women weeping
And wailing at his feet.

There, wan and weary-hearted,
He looks with troubled eye,
And bids them cease their brawling,
And choose them four to die.

But gallantly the leaders
The ancient answer give—
“In Rothenburg the fathers
Together die—or live.”

“Then die, and stop your croaking,
And purge your city’s sin;
But bring a glass of Tauber
To drown this cursèd din.”

So speaks the haughty Tilly,
With lightning in his eyes;
And swift to do his bidding
The Burghermeister hies.

And timidly the maidens
A mighty beaker bring,
With gold and jewels glittered,
And soft with silvering.

The falling lights and shadows
Athwart the rubies play,
And dreamily the dusking
Bespeaks the close of day.

There, worn with heat and battle,
The marshal sips the wine ;
Far, faint across the valleys,
The yellow torches shine.

O sweet the Muskateller,
And red the fatal Est—
But richer glows the Tauber,
The drink he loves the best !

Deep-drowned are all his troubles ;
The wine is soft and clear,
And round his hardy riders
He hands the foaming cheer.

But none the goblet empties,
Though scores the Tauber test,
And laughing cries the marshal,
With mirth-provoking jest :

“ Come, fill me here the flagon,
Up, fill it to the brim—
Hath Rothenburg no hero
To take a soldier’s whim ?

“ Let any drain the goblet,
Let not a drop remain,
And naught but ruddy Tauber
Shall any gullet stain.”

But wilder wail the women,
And loud the children cry ;
And gloomy stand the fathers,
And gloomily they sigh.

But Nusch the challenge hearkens ;
He feels his neighbor’s sword,
Then down he kneels, beseeching
A blessing of the Lord.

“ Most Holy One and Mighty,
Whom Thine own people know,
Remember yet Thy servant
And Thine own mercy show.

“ Whatever road we travel,
The pleasantest is best;
And sweet it were to totter
And stumble into rest;

“ And sweet to die for honor,
For faith and fellow-men—
But he who drains the beaker
May live to drink again.

“ In Thine own time appointed
Must knight and burgher die,
But God can cheat the Devil,
And man at least can try.”

So prays the worthy keeper,
And holds the tankard high
(And let no modern scoffer
This noble deed decry).

But drink, O loyal burgher;
Let not your courage fail,
For wine has conquered women
And warriors in mail.

Down, down he drains the Tauber,
The blackest dregs he drinks,
Then fainting falls exhausted,
And back unconscious sinks.

But saw you e'er a German
Of good and pious girth,
Whom one attack of Tauber
Could bring to Mother Earth?

So hale he lived and hearty
For fourscore years or more—
And dying then, his body
The hoary elders bore.

And to this day the burghers
The traveller will tell
How Nusch the city rescued
By drinking then so well.

